

ALLAN PINKERTON HOUSE (LARGE FARM)
ONARGA, ILLINOIS.
IROQUOIS COUNTY

HABS.NO. ILL - 263.
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38-ONARGA,
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
DISTRICT NO-ILL-2

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
• EDGAR E. LUNDEEN • DISTRICT OFFICER •
CORN BELT BANK BUILDING • BLOOMINGTON, ILL.

ALLAN PINKERTON HOUSE
Onarga, Iroquois County, Illinois

Owner. Mrs. Bruce Van Cleave
9 Warwick Avenue
Winnetka, Illinois

Date of Erection. 1873.

Architect. Unknown.

Builder. Unknown.

Present Condition. The original building has undergone several changes, an addition being placed on the north, which is now used for the kitchen; also the original square building has been extended on the east to include two additional rooms, one on each side of the center hallway. The original structure is fairly well preserved, but is wanting of several much needed repairs.

Number of Stories. One and one-half, with a basement under the original building and the present kitchen on the north.

Materials of Construction. The foundation and basement walls are 13" thick brick masonry. The porch, which originally circled the building, is supported by 13" x 13" brick piers. The interior walls are frame construction with 2" x 4" studding covered with wood lath, plaster and wallpaper. The exterior walls are the same, with clapboards on the outside 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " exposed to the weather. The joists are 2" x 12" pine and 18" on centers. The rafters are 2" x 4" pine, 2'0" on centers, covered with 1" thick

pine sheathing, with wood shingles on the roof. All interior trim is of yellow pine and the floors, except the basement, are of white pine 5½" wide, 1" thick, and tongued and grooved.

The original square building had a veranda on all four sides. Directly above the small room in the center of the attic is a cupola extending six feet vertically from the roof line. It has a short flag pole on top. The cupola is well preserved and has been changed but little, although the stairs which gave access to it from the attic are gone. Running water was furnished to the building by means of a large wind engine, servicing a bathroom that was modern in every detail. The water system has long since been discontinued, but the bathroom fixtures, though not in use, can still be seen in their original places.

The structure as originally built consisted of six rooms, three on each side of a wide hall that ran the entire length of the building. The sides of this hall above the wainscoting are adorned with paintings of battle scenes and officers of the Civil War, the work being done by F. W. Seyer in 1882. The rooms have not been changed, except for the openings into the rooms that have since been added.

Other Existing Records. Written records: Champaign News Gazette of February 23, 1936. National Republic of February, 1936. Onarga Leader and Review of February 20, 1936. Illinois Herald and Review Magazine of November 22, 1936.

Additional Data. Allan Pinkerton came to America from Scotland in 1842, and was the founder of the United States Secret Service. At the time of the Civil War he acted on several occasions as personal body guard to President Abraham Lincoln. In 1864, he bought a plot of 254 acres just north of the village of Onarga, Illinois. In 1873, he erected on this tract of land the building which was to become famous as the Larch Farm.

Little remains of the grandeur it had when originally built. He created on the prairies of Illinois a replica of a gentleman's estate he had known when a boy in Scotland. The larch trees were imported from Scotland and were set in orderly rows along the drives of the estate. Along these drives were planted thousands of flowers in beds that were always neat and orderly. Guards were stationed at the gates, and visitors who drove their horses along the drive faster than a walk were fined five dollars for raising dust that would settle on the flowers.

One drive circled the house and led to the outbuildings. These included the Snuggery, milk house, root cellar, Big Jumbo, and a small barn. Big Jumbo was a very large barn that housed his horses, of which the foundation, only, remains. The Snuggery was the wine house and was built partially underground, the underground part now being filled in. The sloping sides of the ceiling of the Snuggery were covered with portraits of heroic Scots attired in kilts. These oils are still to be seen, though dimmed by age. The

fish pond and swimming pool which were located northeast of the main buildings have been filled in. Originally, there were life sized statues of negroes, Indians, animals, etc., made of iron along the driveways and at the two entrance gates to the grounds, but they, too, have disappeared. The outbuildings, as well as the house, show signs of decay, and little remains now to recall the former glories of the Larch Farm.

These grounds and buildings were constructed as a show place and not for general living quarters. Primarily, it was a week-end retreat for artists, painters, writers, etc., who were friends of Mr. Pinkerton. The flag was hoisted on to the cupola staff at all such times that the grounds were occupied.

The Illinois Central Railroad cut through one side of the grounds and made the crossing of the lane a special stop for guests who came to enjoy the week-end privileges.

References:

Illinois Herald and Review Magazine
for November 22, 1936.

Mr. John Nichols of Onarga, Illinois, who
was once major-domo at the Larch Farm.

(Author) Loren Van Dyke

(Approved) W. E. Lunden
District Officer

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